

MCDOWELL, RYAN

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GENERALS (Union)

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Civil War Officers Union

Irvin McDowell

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

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LINCOLN'S ENDORSEMENT OF THE McDOWELL MEMORANDUM

There are many important documents which have been used as sources in attempting to explain situations which have encouraged controversy. When Henry J. Raymond published *The Life and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln*, he placed in the appendix under section A what he designated as "Letters on Sundry Occasions." Among these writings of Lincoln, he included the famous letter written by the President to McClellan on May 9, 1862.

Apparently Raymond received many comments of a critical nature on this letter, as he immediately prepared for the next issue of the book several additional pages which he compiled in the appendix under a new section which he designated as "B". Here he published, in full, a memorandum of Major General McDowell's personal interviews with the President in January, 1862.

McDowell presented a copy of his memorandum to Raymond in 1864 who in turn submitted it to the President. Mr. Lincoln read the memorandum and returned it to Raymond with this little known endorsement in his own writing:

"I well remember the meetings herein narrated. See nothing for me to object to in the narrative as being made by General McDowell, except the phrase attributed to me '*of the Jacobinism of Congress*', which phrase I do not remember using literally or in substance, and which I wish not be published in any event.

"October 7, 1864.

A. Lincoln."

A few excerpts from the memorandum which had the above endorsement of Lincoln follow:

"January 10, 1862.—At dinner at Arlington, Virginia. Received a note from the Assistant Secretary of War, saying the President wished to see me that evening at eight o'clock, if I could safely leave my post. . . . Repaired to the President's house at eight o'clock p. m. Found the President alone. Was taken into the small room in the northeast corner. Soon after, we were joined by Brigadier-General Franklin, the Secretary of State, Governor Seward, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Assistant Secretary of War. The President was greatly disturbed at the state of affairs. Spoke of the exhausted condition of the Treasury; of the loss of public credit; of the Jacobinism in Congress; of the delicate situation of our foreign relations; of the bad news he had received from the West, particularly as contained in a letter from General Halleck on the state of affairs in Missouri; of the want of co-operation between General Halleck and General Buell; but, more than all, the sickness of General McClellan.

"The President said he was in great distress, and, as he had been to General McClellan's house, and the General did not ask to see him, and as he must talk to somebody, he had sent for General Franklin and myself, to obtain our opinion as to the possibility of soon commencing active operations with the Army of the Potomac.

"To use his own expression, if something was not soon done, the bottom would be out of the whole affair; and, if General McClellan did not want to use the army, he would like to 'borrow it,' provided he could see how it could be made to do something. . . . In answer to the question from the President, what could soon be done with the army, I replied that the question as to the *when* must be preceded by the one as to the *how* and the *where*. That, substantially, I would organize the army into four army corps.

"January 11. . . . Met at the President's in the evening at eight o'clock. Present the same as on the first day, with the addition of the Postmaster-General, Judge Blair, who came in after the meeting had begun the discussion. I read the annexed paper, marked (A), as containing both General Franklin's and my own views, General Franklin agreeing with me, in view of time, &c. . . . The President wished to have General Meigs in consultation.

"January 12. . . . Met at the President's. General Meigs mentioned the time in which he could assemble transports

as a month to six weeks. The general subject of operations from the present base was again discussed. . . . The President and Mr. Seward said that General McClellan had been out to see the President, and was looking quite well; and that now, as he was able to assume the charge of the army, the President would drop any further proceedings with us.

"January 13, Monday. . . . Went to the President's with the Secretary of the Treasury. Present, the President, Governor Chase, Governor Seward, Postmaster-General, General McClellan, General Meigs, General Franklin, and myself, and I think the Assistant Secretary of War. The President, pointing to a map, asked me to go over the plan I had before spoken to him of. He, at the same time, made a brief explanation of how he came to bring General Franklin and General McDowell before him. . . . I concluded my remarks by saying something apologetic in explanation of the position in which we were, to which General McClellan replied somewhat coldly, if not curtly: 'You are entitled to have any opinion you please!' No discussion was entered into by him whatever, the above being the only remark he made.

"The President then asked what and when any thing could be done, again going over somewhat the same ground he had done with General Franklin and myself.

"General McClellan said the case was so clear a blind man could see it, and then spoke of the difficulty of ascertaining what force he could count upon. . . . The Secretary of the Treasury then put a direct question to General McClellan, to the effect as to what he intended doing with his army, and when he intended doing it. After a long silence, General McClellan answered that the movement in Kentucky was to precede any one from this place. After another pause, he said he must say he was very unwilling to develop his plans, always believing that in military matters the fewer persons who were knowing to them the better; that he would tell them if he was ordered to do so. The President then asked him if he had counted upon any particular time; he did not ask what that time was, but had he in his own mind any particular time fixed, when a movement could be commenced. He replied he had. 'Then,' rejoined the President, 'I will adjourn this meeting.'

The President's letter of May 9, 1862, to McClellan which was responsible for Raymond printing the McDowell memorandum with Lincoln's endorsement follows:

"Fortress Monroe, May 9, 1862.
"My dear Sir: I have just assisted the Secretary of War in forming the part of a dispatch to you, relating to army corps, which dispatch, of course, will have reached you long before this will. I wish to say a few words to you privately on this subject. I ordered the army corps organization not only on the unanimous opinion of the twelve generals of divisions, but also on the unanimous opinion of every *military man* I could get an opinion from, and every modern military book, yourself only excepted. Of course, I did not on my own judgment pretend to understand the subject. I now think it indispensable for you to know how your struggle against it is received in quarters which we cannot entirely disregard. It is looked upon as merely an effort to pamper one or two pets, and to persecute and degrade their supposed rivals. I have had no word from Sumner, Heintzelman, or Keyes. The commanders of these corps are of course the three highest officers with you, but I am constantly told that you have no consultation or communication with them. . . . But to return, are you strong enough, even with my help, to set your foot upon the neck of Sumner, Heintzelman, and Keyes, all at once? This is a practical and very serious question for you.

"Yours truly,

"A. Lincoln."

